



# The View From Right Field

By Rick Ohler

A bi-weekly column in  
The East Aurora Advertiser

No. 6 “The Great Mazu”

August 11, 2005/East Aurora, NY.

**W**hen people ask me about my greatest sports moment . . . OK, so nobody has ever asked me about my greatest sports moment, but *if* someone did ask me, I would have to say it was the night I got to stand in for the Great Mazu.

The Great Mazu, as many of you know, is our own Lenny Mazurkiewicz, East Aurora High School class of '71, member of the high school's athletic hall of fame, and the Town of Aurora and Western New York baseball halls of fame, and probably the best baseball player this town has ever produced. Lenny rewrote the record books in high school, had a pro baseball tryout and then anchored the legendary championship West Falls town team before turning to softball. In the slow-pitch leagues Lenny became renowned for his ability to hit a softball farther than anyone ever had. His home runs were Ruthian blasts—onto the roof at Parkdale School, into the tennis courts at Hamlin Park, over the parking lot at the Community Center in South Wales.

My sports resume, alas, was not quite so impressive and includes only visits to halls of fame, not enshrinement. My similarities to Lenny started and ended with the fact that we were (and still are) both left-handed. I was an enthusiastic participant in many sports as was Lenny, but my results are forgettable. My father, a three-sport coach at Nichols School who sent many of his hockey players on to successful Division I university careers was a shrewd judge of athletic talent. Of my ability he said I was “adequate,” hardly a ringing endorsement. The headline “Varsity wins big game; Rick Ohler once again adequate,” would probably not get by most sports page editors.

Nevertheless, Lenny and I found ourselves on the same softball team one season, the Racqueteers. He played first base and I filled in wherever the manager thought I could do the least damage. It happened, however, that during our season Moog, Lenny’s employer, thoughtlessly moved him to second shift (without so much as consulting us, I might add), meaning he couldn’t play our 6:45 games. I, more by default than anything else, was installed as the first baseman.

In our first game sans the Great Mazu I came up to bat in the early innings, and just as I was settling in at the plate, the opposing manager bellowed, “Walk him!”

“Why?” said the pitcher, whom I had obviously failed to intimidate.

“I heard they got a left-handed first baseman who hits the ball a mile. We can’t afford a home run.”

“Wait a minute,” I said. “You think I’m Lenny Mazurkiewicz? C’mon. I couldn’t hit a home run if you gave me two shots and let me take the second from where the first ball lands.”

But they wouldn’t believe me, and the umpire waved me on to first base with my first, and only, intentional walk of my career. For one brief moment I had been the most feared batter in the Town of Aurora Men’s Softball League.

Lenny still plays softball, and is much sought after by teams far and wide. He has also become quite a civic champion; it is not unusual to see his picture in this newspaper raising money for the Boys and Girls Club and other causes. I, on the other hand, was forced to watch a video of myself playing not long after the night I stood in for the Great Mazu. I promptly retired and soon began coaching my own kids.

## **The Great Mazu**

When people ask me about my greatest sports moment . . . OK, so nobody has ever asked me about my greatest sports moment, but *if* someone did ask me, I would have to say it was the night I got to stand in for the Great Mazu.

The Great Mazu, as many of you know, is our own Lenny Mazurkiewicz, East Aurora High School class of '71, member of the high school athletic hall of fame, and the Town of Aurora and Western New York baseball halls of fame, and probably the best baseball player this town has ever produced. Lenny rewrote the record books in high school, had a pro baseball tryout and then anchored the legendary championship West Falls town team before turning to softball. In the slow-pitch leagues Lenny became renowned for his ability to hit a softball farther than anyone ever had. His home runs were Ruthian blasts—onto the roof at Parkdale School, into the tennis courts at Hamlin Park, over the parking lot at the Community Center in South Wales.

My sports resume, alas, was not quite so impressive and includes only visits to halls of fame, not enshrinement. My similarities to Lenny started and ended with the fact that we were (and still are) both left-

handed. I was an enthusiastic participant in many sports as was Lenny, but my results are forgettable. My father, a three-sport coach at Nichols School who sent many of his hockey players on to successful Division I university careers was a shrewd judge of athletic talent. Of my ability he said I was “adequate,” hardly a ringing endorsement. The headline “Varsity wins big game; Rick Ohler once again adequate,” would probably not get by most sports page editors.

Nevertheless, Lenny and I found ourselves on the same softball team one season, the Racquetees. He played first base and I filled in wherever the manager thought I could do the least damage. It happened, however, that during our season Moog, Lenny’s employer, thoughtlessly moved him to second shift (without so much as consulting us, I might add), meaning he couldn’t play our 6:45 games. I, more by default than anything else, was installed as the first baseman.

In our first game sans the Great Mazu I came up to bat in the early innings, and just as I was settling in at the plate, the opposing manager bellowed, “Walk him!”

“Why?” said the pitcher, whom I had obviously failed to intimidate.

“I heard they got a left-handed first baseman who hits the ball a mile. We can’t afford a home run.”

“Wait a minute,” I said. “You think I’m Lenny Mazurkiewicz? C’mon. I couldn’t hit a home run if you gave me two shots and let me take the second from where the first ball lands.”

But they wouldn’t believe me, and the umpire waved me on to first base with my first, and only, intentional walk of my career. For one brief moment I had been the most feared batter in the Town of Aurora Men’s Softball League.

Lenny still plays softball, and is much sought after by teams far and wide. He has also become quite a civic champion; it is not unusual to see

his picture in this newspaper raising money for the Boys and Girls Club and other causes. I, on the other hand, was forced to watch a video of myself playing not long after the night I stood in for the Great Mazu. I promptly retired and soon began coaching my own kids.